

LASSEN COUNTY EDUCATION REPORT

Office of Education Report

On August 19, 2009, Mr. Jud Jensen, Superintendent of Schools for Lassen County, provided the Grand Jury with the status of Westwood School District's finances. Mr. Jensen gave a detailed account of his involvement with the Westwood School District finances, why he got involved and what the findings were which were presented to him by the Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team (FCMAT). The FCMAT represents the State of California in regards to finance and school districts. The findings from FCMAT documented many irregularities in the finances of Westwood School District, Westwood Charter School and Westwood Charter School Services Inc. This matter has been referred to District Attorney Bob Burns and he forwarded it to the State Attorney General's Office. The state has assigned a prosecutor to work on this case. The Grand Jury commends Mr. Jensen for his detailed report and his efforts on behalf of the residents of Lassen County.

Lassen Union High School

On October 21, 2009, Dr. Todd Cutler, Lassen Union High School Superintendent, spoke to the Lassen County Grand Jury. Dr. Cutler provided a very frank and honest presentation regarding Lassen High School. He began by saying that Lassen Union High School (LUHS) is in fairly good financial shape at this time but must be ready to deal with further cuts in education the State of California is expected to make. His goals for the future include improving student academic success, improving teaching delivery systems to students, and improving LUHS relationship with the communities it serves. Dr. Cutler provided very detailed and down to earth ideas and methods to achieve these goals in the future. He was passionate in his resolve to make LUHS the best school it can be.

Dr. Cutler has met with Dr. Douglas Houston, President of Lassen Community College (LCC), to improve the relationship between the two institutions. He would like to see more support and advice given to graduating seniors so they are aware of admission requirements needed to continue their education. He was disappointed that he has had limited contact with the college in this area and that not all the pieces are in place in his opinion at this time.

Dr. Cutler also discussed the new Diamond Mountain Charter School program. He feels that it is off to a good start and will provide a good education experience to students who choose to attend. He also mentioned that the new building will be used for a variety of activities besides the charter school so that LUHS can get the most use for the money invested.

Dr. Cutler answered questions from members of the grand jury on a variety of subjects. His straight forward and honest answers were appreciated by the members.

McKinley Elementary School Visit

On December 2, 2009, members of the Grand Jury Education Committee visited with Donna Wix, Principal, McKinley Elementary School.

The 60 year old facility currently has K through 3rd grade, but will return to K through 5th grade when Diamond View School is completed. The school has an active School Site Council. The Academic Performance Index (API) was 763, which is below the 800 goal. They are actively working to achieve this goal. The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is in Improvement Status. This is being aggressively resolved. The staff is looking for ways to reduce classroom and office waste. The school is actively using the Character Counts Program for the students. The library was well supplied and used daily. The kitchen was small but clean and functional.

During our tour of the campus we found the facilities very clean and well maintained. The staff was positive and morale was good.

Meadow View and Diamond View School Visits

On December 11, 2009, the Grand Jury visited the Meadow View (MV) and Diamond View (DV) schools, both housed on the same campus due to the closing of the DV school building last year. Principals Vicky Leitaker (MV) and Patty Gunderson (DV) addressed the group. They explained how things were running with two schools on one campus. Segregating the younger and older students is a big concern. Their system was explained in great detail with tremendous effort given to keeping the student bodies' separate. Mrs. Leitaker did say that the older students are a blessing this year and are very helpful to the younger students. Both schools are doing the best they can with current finances and are unfortunately expecting mid year cuts that will further impact the operation of the two schools. DV and MV are both on program improvement status with regards to state testing. They each have one sub group that is not progressing at the same rate as the others. Strategies have been implemented to address the progress of these groups. An after school program for homework has begun at DV. The MV has expended more money for classroom aides in hopes of improving test scores. The School Site Council is active at both schools.

Although there were numerous activities occurring during the visit, it was noted that Mrs. Leitaker and Mrs. Gunderson were calm and in control of the situations. They answered our questions honestly and professionally. The Grand Jury feels the students are in good hands.

Johnstonville School Visit

On December 14, 2009, Grand Jury members visited with Sally Clark, Principal, Johnstonville School. The school houses kindergarten through eighth grade. The API score for Johnstonville was 785 in 2009, well above the 760 that is required. The School Site Council is very active. They currently meet twice a month, and is largely responsible for bringing the school up to standards after the resignation of the previous principal in April 2009. The current enrollment is

225 students. The school experienced some staff cuts in June 2009, with the potential of more cuts at the end of this school year. Staff morale was very low during layoffs, but is currently showing improvement. Some faculty members have been staying after hours to tutor students with no compensation. Another area that was affected due to the budget cuts was bus routes had to be reduced. The school has some long term goals they are working on: Funding for after school programs; paving around gymnasium; and improving the area where parents pickup their students.

When members of the Grand Jury toured the school, it was apparent the grounds were well maintained. The group also received a tour of the library, various classrooms, multi- purpose room, computer lab, and the recently completed gymnasium.

Susanville School District

On December 16, 2009, Dr. Gary McIntire, Superintendent of Susanville Schools addressed the Grand Jury. He began his presentation by giving a report on the progress of the remodeling of Diamond View Middle School. The removal of asbestos has been completed and construction will begin as soon as the board approves the contract. The goal is to have Diamond View School open by September 2010. Dr. McIntire gave a detailed plan on how the district will get as much construction completed as possible with the funding that is available. Dr. McIntire seemed to have a plan for all contingencies and was well aware of problems facing the district. The Grand Jury found his presentation thorough and informative.

Richmond School Visit

On January 7, 2010, members of the Education committee met with Ms. Cynthia Nellums, Principal of Richmond School. Ms. Nellums gave a short update about the status of the school. She informed the group the school is debt free and the enrollment is approximately 210 students with an API of 863. At the time of the visit, the School Site Council was not very active (only two parents were involved). Future projects within the next five years at Richmond include reroofing the gymnasium and remodeling classrooms. Mrs. Nellums stated the school has an active music program. She also mentioned the need for a program for higher achievers to qualify for the U.C. system. After the update, members of the Grand Jury toured the campus and found the facilities and grounds well maintained. One interesting item of interest was the Absorptive Media Removal System used to remove arsenic from the water.

Big Valley School Visit

On March 23, 2010, the Education committee visited Big Valley School in Beiber. Superintendent Dr. Richard Rhodes provided a guided tour of all the schools in his K-12 district. As with all schools in California, Big Valley is facing tremendous financial challenges. Due to budget constraints, the elementary school in Adin was closed and students and staff were moved to the campus in Beiber. This move took a great deal of planning and meetings with parents and

community members so they could understand why the move, although unpopular, was economically necessary. There have been many layoffs of classified and certificated employees and one administrator this year. The average daily attendance is in decline. If this trend continues they may have to look into consolidation with other small districts. Many counties are looking at possible consolidations next year. A representative from Fresno-Bakersfield area visited Dr. Rhodes to discuss how to consolidate schools in their area so the problem is statewide.

Commendation: Even though things are very tough for the schools, Big Valley is fortunate to have Dr. Rhodes as their leader. He works tirelessly to try and provide a quality education for his students. He is able to make hard decisions and backs up all his decisions with facts so that everyone can see why certain moves had to be made. The atmosphere at the school is positive with everyone doing what they can to provide a quality education for the students.

The Grand Jury would like to commend Dr. Rhodes and his staff for their hard work in dealing with the problems they face.

Lassen Community College

The Grand Jury asked Dr. Doug Houston to respond with a letter regarding the status of the accreditation of Lassen Community College. The following letter was submitted by Dr. Houston.



Lassen Community College District

Office of the Superintendent/President

February 8, 2010

Ken Bishop, Chair
Lassen County Grand Jury
220 South Lassen Street, Ste. 6
Susanville, CA 96130

RE: *Lassen Community College Accreditation*

Dear Mr. Bishop:

At their January meeting the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), Western Association of Schools and Colleges took action to remove Lassen Community College from warning status, and reaffirm accreditation.

Lassen College has been and still remains an accredited California Community College as granted by ACCJC. What this means for our community is that we have a local community college, where one can receive a quality education with the availability of fully transferable course work, and the eligibility for federal financial aid when needed.

Regional accrediting commissions, such as ACCJC, ensure educational institutions meet public expectations by ensuring colleges adhere to standards of best practice. The Commission conducts periodic comprehensive evaluations of institutions, and when warranted special visits, through the use of peer evaluation teams. These teams are comprised of educational professionals recognized for particular expertise in various areas of college operations. These teams submit evaluation findings and recommendations to the Accrediting Commissions which ultimately determines the colleges' compliance with the Commission's standards of best practice in higher education. The Commission in turn determines the accreditation standing and where necessary recommends the college take action to meet accreditation standards. As a result of this process, the commission may impose sanctions on a college based upon their confidence in the college's ability to comply with the standards of best practice.

Now that the accreditation has been reaffirmed, the Lassen Community College Governing Board, faculty, staff and administration are committed to stay the course and continue the

Ken Bishop, Chair

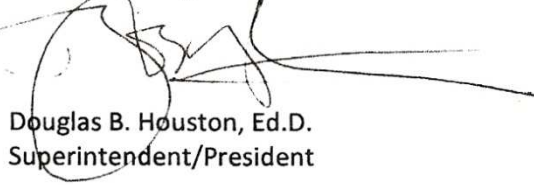
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success using the best practices that are now in place. Through this process the College has become stronger and more committed to serving the communities of Lassen County by providing outstanding programs and fully transferable course work to all those pursuing higher education goals.

Later this month, Lassen Community College District will present an updated "Fact Book" that will include data on student success, as was first suggested in last years' Grand Jury report.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas B. Houston", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Douglas B. Houston, Ed.D.
Superintendent/President

DBH:jlj